

The Necessity of Diverse Networking

The other day I had lunch at the Goose with Brian Brownfield and Wilson Greene. Both are great friends and excellent plaintiff's personal injury lawyers. I also grew up with them. They know my awkward stages well. Over chicken fried steak and meatloaf, we discussed our triumphs, hinted at our failures and remembered friends recently deceased. We also discussed what we do in certain situations: kids, family and professional. These lunches can be a great way to feed my ego—that others like Brian and Wilson value my input.

These kinds of lunches are where 90% of my real continuing education occur. I tell them about my fights against protective orders, policy of refusing to agree to them, and constitutional basis for and case law regarding the same. They tell me about trial preparation, 30.02 witness depositions, how to best depose opposing experts and the best age to allow my kids to spend the night with their friends. I sincerely value their advice and friendship. I trust them; they trust me.

It's not just them, but I have a lot of lunches with a number of other plaintiff's lawyers. It is how I get better at my practice and keep the referral network of cases flowing. But those kinds of lunches can have adverse effects—unreasonable settlement demands and seeing the other side as, well, not evil...But the other... We rally the horses and circle the wagons. There's a lot of potential for confirmation bias.

Likewise, I frequently lunch with Bill Carol and other defense attorneys and learn their perspectives, expanding my informal CLE network. When I did defense work, the danger of bias was greater. Defense firms are larger than plaintiffs' and better resourced. I had partners pressuring me to get a case dismissed, often at unreasonable times. The associates, partners and I continuously discussed how baseless claims were. We discussed that not only among ourselves, but other large defense firms and their lawyers. Definite confirmation bias with the numbers and money behind us.

With that in mind, I am grateful for my civil defense background. I was trained with that mind set. I even went to law school with the goal of defending physicians in those "baseless" medical malpractice suits. My father, Lyman, was an OB/GYN and subject to such a suit, *Hyman Armstrong v. Gunderson*, 279 S.W.3d 90 (Ky 2008). It made it to the Kentucky Supreme Court. Weirdly enough, I cite my father's case in pleadings on occasion. As I practice plaintiff's personal injury cases, I am grateful for my rush to a defense mindset, because I immediately think of all the ways I can lose a case or see damages mitigated. I sincerely think it makes me a better lawyer and puts me in a better position to resolve cases.

Were I to only hang out with plaintiff's lawyers, my lens on my own cases would be skewed to the absurd. The British neuroscientist and professor of Cognitive and Computational Neuroscience at the University of Sussex, Anil Seth, discusses how the awareness of self and our consciousness is made up of our pre-existing narratives, which is essentially created by what we feed in our own minds and with whom we surround ourselves. Expansive and diverse viewpoint networking is key to having a better understanding of our fellows and the actual world around us.

Diverse networking is key. The Louisville Bar Association fosters such an environment. There, all areas of law come together. Agency lawyers, judges, family law, criminal, intellectual property and civil practitioners all converge. I love talking to those who work totally outside my practice area. It's how I learn more about the law and people that practice it. I learn about their, and their clients', pressure and motivating points. It's how I learn the perspective of others. At the Louisville Bar Association, I actively feed diverse practice viewpoints into my brain that's naturally full of implicit biases. It's a way get over that.

Surround yourself with the views of others. It will make you see things clearer and become receptive to new ideas, especially the radical idea that you might just be wrong.



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Bryan R. Armstrong
LBA President